

RULES and DIRECTIONS

FOR THE

FELLOWSHIP-MEETINGS.

By the Reverend
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Late Minister at Orr in Galloway.

To which is annexed,

AN ACT of the ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY, concerning FEL- LOWSHIP-MEETINGS.

Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. Mal. iii. 16.

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MDCCLVI.



RULES and DIRECTIONS

F O R

FELLOWSHIP-MEETINGS.

A Society of this nature is, *A lesser or greater number of private persons, or at least acting in a private station, professors of the true religion, meeting together in some fit place, for prayer, Christian converse, reading, and other duties of the communion of saints, at stated or occasional times, for spiritual benefit and edification, and for the glory of God as the last end.*

Such societies are warranted by scripture, *Ezra ix. 4. Mal. iii. 16. Acts xvi. 13. Heb x. 25 &c.* Some circumstances of them must be regulated by Christian prudence, according to general rules of scripture. In such societies we consider six things.

I. *The members constituent* And these should be of sound principles, of a blameless conversation, endued with a competent measure of knowledge, and exercised both about their souls, and the declarative glory of God in the world.

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II. *Admission of members afterwards.* None ought to be pressed to it indiscereetly; nevertheless a modest and serious invitation of persons who are meet, is very allowable. This should be a *willing* coming together, *Acts* ii. 41. 42. And those who are to be admitted, should be communed with by two or three sent from the *meeting*: and these should take some account of their knowledge; and inquire likewise somewhat, in a modest way, concerning what experience they have of God's work on their souls; and should inquire likewise what moveth them to seek to be joined in the *meeting*. Moreover, some search should be made into their conversations, and concerning their judgment about the sin and duty of the time; that all the members, if possible, may be of one heart and way: and if nothing be found which can justly hinder their admission, they being known to perform secret and family worship, they may be admitted for some days, until it seem fit to the *meeting* to put them to perform worship: but if they be scandalous, or under evil reports, they are to be kept back till they be fully cleared.

III. *Their work while in the meeting.* When they come together, let one begin with prayer: after which they may discourse on some useful and practical subject or case; or, if they can, let some propose *questions* from our *Confession of Faith* and *Catechism*. Let them beware of any thing



thing unsound or unnecessary in that conference; and let no jars or needless debates get place: and if any thing of that nature appear, it is fit they break off, and go to prayer again. As many may pray at one *diet* as the *meeting* can wait upon; and, for ordinary, let every *member* pray his time about, that none be despised or overlooked. They may sing a psalm, and, if it be thought fit, read a chapter, before prayer. When they resolve to part, they may sing a psalm. After which they may, before they part, confer about other things; such as, the news, if remarkable, collections, admission of others, the case of delinquents, &c. But let them then beware of becoming carnal, or giving way to foolish jesting, or any thing tending to frustrate the design and end of such *meetings*.

IV. *The circumstances of place and time.*
 1. They should meet in a place equally distant from all the *members* their residences, or at least thereabout. It should be a fixed place; and not sometimes here, sometimes there. 2. Where or when the *members* want sermon on the Lord's day, it is fit they meet upon that day, and likewise upon a working day once in fifteen or twenty days; but where the *members* have the public ordinances to go to on the Lord's day, they should have their *meetings* weekly on a working day. 3. When they meet, they may

spend at one time four or five hours, or more, closely in sacred duties, *viz.* praying, conferring, reading, singing, &c. Let them not be diverted, by idling away the time, or by other discourses, &c. Let them beware of wearying, or hurrying to an end. The hour of meeting should be named, and all should punctually come at it; which if any do not, they are to be sharply reprov'd, unless they have valid grounds.

V. *The way with delinquents.* 1. When any *member* falls under open scandal, he is to be secluded, until he give evident signs of his true repentance, and until he both satisfy the *kirk-session* and the *meeting* about it. 2. When any *member*, by omission or commission, offendeth the rest, or any of them; the offended should, *first*, see that the thing be sinful indeed, and that they catch not at that opportunity to vent their prejudice. *2dly*, They should not spread it abroad, until they first speak to the offender by himself. That scripture-rule, *Matth. xviii. 15. 16.* (though Christ be the author of it), is little regarded in our day, when back-biting is so epidemic. No man, indeed, should suffer sin to lie on his brother, but should reprove and admonish him; and he, on the other hand, should meekly receive it: and if the offender satisfy the offended, the reprov'r should bury the fault, and never let it be known; but

but if he do not satisfy his brother, one or two men more may be taken; and if he regard not their reproof and admonition, the matter may then come before the meeting: and if yet the offender satisfy not, (supposing always that the offence be really given, and of a sinful nature), then he is to be secluded from the meeting, until he satisfy the offended, so far as can justly be required. In all which procedure, it is requisite, that the offended exercise great prudence, meekness, and self-denial, together with zeal. 3. If any member be either absent from the meeting, or come not in due time, without sufficient reasons, (about which he is to satisfy the meeting so far as is decent), he is for the first fault to be reproofed, and admonished to mend; but if he mend not, he is for the second fault to be more severely rebuked: and if that prevail not, the meeting may intimate to him, that they cannot employ him to perform duties among them; and may actually make a conclusion against him for that effect: and if nothing prevail, he is to be secluded, till he be brought to see his sin in this matter. The like we say of scandalous strifes and debates. Let nothing in all this be done to inroad on the *ministry* or *church-censures*.

VI. *Some generals incumbent on members of meetings.* 1. When more meetings than one are in a parish or corner, they may all meet together

ther once every month, or so, for prayer, &c. and once in every quarter of a year, to confer about things of public concernment touching the *meetings*. This we call a *correspondence*.

2. Concerning *fast-days*, we leave it to the prudence of members; only where there are more *meetings* than one in a corner, they should consult together about them, that the causes and day may be the same in every one of the *meetings* of that corner. 3. Whatever be done in these *meetings*, let it be kept secret; and let no member discover any of the *meeting's* actings to any out of that *meeting*.

4. In matters of the public testimony, let no *member*, nor yet any single *meeting*, meddle to do any thing but with the consent of the general *correspondence*.

5. No *member* should take on him any public office, or undertake any debatable practice, nor yet go to law, without acquainting the *meeting*, and seeking their advice and consent.

6. No *member* should go to any penny-weddings, or frequent debauched company, under the pain of seclusion from the *meeting*.

7. They should labour to have their conversation every way becoming the gospel, and becoming such a profession; and should do more than others do, seeing they profess more. Therefore they should be much taken up in secret prayer, reading the scriptures, and coming to public ordinances dispensed in God's way.

8. They should not be selfish; but should study to be useful to, and watch

watch over one another: yea, not only should they take heed to *members of meetings*, but also ought to reprove sin in all. And as they should worship God in their families evening and morning daily; so they should instruct their family once, or oftener, every week, by asking them questions out of the *Catechisms*.

If any think these are heavy burdens laid on them, let them consider, 1. The word of God requires the same, and many more duties to be done. 2. It is a sign of persons being unregenerate, when they habitually look on religious exercises as a burden. We grant indeed, many (though professors) perform holy duties only to ease their consciences, to gain and preserve a name and reputation to themselves, or for some other such ends. Hence they account *religion a weariness*, and perform not duties with cheerfulness and satisfaction, *nor with all their hearts*, as God in his word commands. It were the interest of such to seek of God, that he would make them his *workmanship created in Christ Jesus to good works*, Eph. ii. 19. For, 3. Though, in those who are regenerate, the remaining corruption in their nature opposeth both the law, and the motions of the renewed nature endeavouring to obey the law; yet the renewed part, being nourished by Christ the head, doth habitually overcome the other party: so that the duties of religion, in secret, private,

private, and public, are their very element, when grace is in exercise, *Psal. cxix.* The law of God is the rule they love, and chuse to walk by, having it *written on their hearts*, and being spiritually-minded, and doing all in faith, *i. e.* eying *Christ* as the *principal pattern, altar, and end* of all their holy duties. Hence *Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light* to them; and, by taking it upon them, *they find rest to their souls*, *Matth. xii. 29. 30.* Yea, *the way of the Lord is strength to the upright: They shall walk therein and not faint, run and not be weary. They shall renew their strength, Is. xl. 31. They go from strength to strength, Psal. lxxxiv. 7. They bring forth fruit in old age, and are fat and flourishing, Psal. xcii. 14.* These are privileges promised to the godly in *Christ Jesus*. Let persons who know nothing of these things in reality, be restless till they know them; and let those who have experience of them in any measure, praise God for what he hath bestowed, and pray for more.



A C T

ACT of the ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY, concerning Fellowship-meetings.

Dunfermline, August 12. 1740.

WHICH day and place, the Associate Presbytery being met, they recommend to such as have acceded to them, to form themselves into societies for prayer and Christian conference; this being a duty commanded in the word of God, and which has been much valued and countenanced of the Lord, *Acts 16.*; and, in these societies, instead of questions that may not be so much for edification, that, together with a diligent reading of the holy scriptures, they also carefully peruse our *Confession of Faith*, and *Catechisms Larger and Shorter*, and read the scripture-proofs subjoined to the same, that they may see that their faith, as to those articles of religion, does not terminate on a human, but upon the divine testimony in the word; and that they make use of such approved helps opening up those principles, as they may have at hand.

Moreover, the presbytery recommend unto the said societies and acceders, that they study to know and be acquainted with the public cause of Christ, our reformation-principles, and the testimony of the day, in opposition to that flood of defection and backsliding, which the judicatures of the established church have been so long going into. And they further earnestly recommend, that parents and masters of families be careful to instruct their children and servants in those principles.

Edinburgh, August 15. 1754.

The Associate Synod recommend unto all the praying societies under their inspection, to observe diets for fasting and humiliation, as they can overtake them, and as the Lord in his providence may call and direct.

F I N I S.

